

THE WORLD'S MOST FAMOUS SPY

An Exclusive Interview with E. Howard Hunt by David Clammarco

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—President Richard Nixon to H.R. Haldeman,
June 23, 1972, six days after the Watergate break-in



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E. Howard Hunt sits in the yard of his Florida home in 1995. Photograph by David Giammarco.



Nestled in a suburban community north of Miami is the home of E. Howard Hunt—perhaps the world's most famous spy, second only to James Bond. Only the Bond legacy is one of fiction. Not so for Howard Hunt. □ This year marks the 28th anniversary that a security guard named Frank Wills discovered a taped-open door lock in the basement garage of the Watergate complex in Washington, D.C. He called the police, and thereby began the destruction of Richard Nixon's presidency. During the next two turbulent years, 58 people would be charged with Watergate-related crimes, 22 would go to jail, and Richard Milhous Nixon would become the first president in American history to resign the White House, barely one step ahead of impeachment. □ Watergate also marked the end of a

carefully maintained cover of Howard Hunt's 21-year clandestine employment with the Central Intelligence Agency. For it was Bernard Barker—one of Hunt's five-member Watergate entry team—who, when arrested, was found carrying an address book listing Hunt's phone number alongside the notation "W-House." The connection led the FBI to Hunt, quickly exposing a web of White House and CIA intrigue that has yet to be fully understood. Publicly exposed, Hunt was indicted and pleaded guilty to conspiracy, burglary and wiretapping charges. Sentenced by Judge John Sirica to 35 years in prison, Hunt served 33 months before being paroled in 1977.

Officially "retired" from the CIA when he joined the Nixon administration in 1971 as a member of the in-house intelligence unit known as "The Plumbers" (nicknamed for their skill in stopping leaks), the Agency did not come to Hunt's rescue after his arrest. "If you remember the old 'Mission: Impossible' intro: 'If caught, the Secretary will disavow any knowledge'—well that's what they did," explains Hunt during an interview over lunch on his backyard patio.

Hunt's real name, photographs and CIA background were quickly disseminated throughout the world media, and his carefully cloaked identity was unmasked. His shadowy past as one of the Cold War's most infamous operatives was abruptly being scrutinized and dissected. Suddenly links were being uncovered between Hunt and a secret history of espionage evils, including the biggest bombshell of them all: the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

"You know, I once heard from a fellow who worked for me, a retired colonel, who said, 'There's a feeling around here that you let the Agency down, and that you're responsible for the disfavor in which the Agency is held by the general public,'" Hunt explains. "And I said to him, 'What are you talking about? If anything, the Agency owes me one giant apology because they were the ones who revealed my covert connection, after like 30 years of building up a cover. They gave me away like that!'" he says with a snap of his fingers. "They, in effect, turned over all my files, everything else, and said, 'Yeah, he's a CIA officer.' I mean, I can talk about outcomes, but I can't talk about origins ... you should ask [former CIA director] Dick Helms about that."

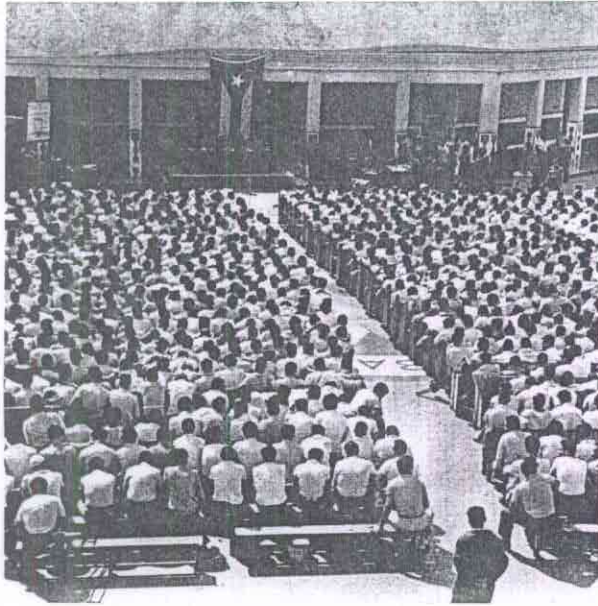
Now 82 years old, Hunt is leading a life far removed from his days of espionage and skullduggery—sort of. He first started translating his experiences into fiction back in 1942 with *East of Farewell*, the first book about the Second World War by an American participant. Since

then, Hunt has authored more than 70 well-received spy novels and political capers. His latest—*Gulley Knowledge*—is a compelling account of sexual and political conspiracy in Washington's highest echelons. The book details how a prominent senator, on the fast track to being the first female president of the United States, is blackmailed by political forces bent on denailing her ascent to the Oval Office. Hunt calls the book, written a year before the Clinton-Lewinsky sex scandal broke, "a political novel of Washington today and tomorrow The concept of a female president, whether Mrs. Dole or Mrs. Clinton, is gaining greater currency," he says.



Hunt, right, shares a laugh with William F. Buckley before appearing on Buckley's talk show, "Firing Line," in May 1974. Buckley has been a good friend of Hunt's since their days together in the CIA during the 1950s.

UPI/CHRIS BETHMANN



Some of the 1,000-plus men captured during the failed Bay of Pigs invasion appear before a Cuban revolutionary court in Havana on April 10, 1962.

representative to the Cuban provisional government in exile. The CIA planned to overthrow Fidel Castro by training anti-Castro Cuban exiles in Florida and infiltrating them into Cuba to stir up a rebellion. Hunt's exile leaders would then land and proclaim themselves the provisional government of "Free Cuba." The CIA had previously succeeded in sponsoring coups in Iran, Guatemala and the Philippines, and Cuba was expected to be the Agency's next success. But on April 17, 1961, the Bay of Pigs invasion disintegrated on the shores of Cuba, and U.S. involvement was exposed.

Because the CIA invasion plans seemed so obviously flawed, many people believed that the operation had a clandestine agenda: trapped on the beach by Castro's forces, the 1,500 underequipped Cuban exiles would have to be saved by a massive U.S. military intervention, thereby forcing President Kennedy to invade Cuba—something to which JFK, who had inherited the

"I went to Cuba...before the Bay of Pigs...and concluded that the invasion force could not expect any assistance from the Cuban people until it was all clear. Well, that doesn't help. So I said, 'It's going to have to be done all by us...we have to do it.'" —E. Howard Hunt

Guilty Knowledge is a dynamic page-turner—a hallmark of Hunt's numerous yarns over the years. His 1997 novel, *Dragon Teeth*, was a taut thriller of political scheming between the United States and China that seemed remarkably prescient of current relations. It has been suggested by some, however, that Hunt is still CIA, and that the numerous books—written under pseudonyms such as Gordon Davis, Robert Dietrich and David St. John—are really vehicles for the dissemination of CIA disinformation.

"In a sense, my books are educational," muses Hunt, who after a war injury briefly worked as a war correspondent for *Life* magazine in the South Pacific before joining the Office of Strategic Services (forerunner of the CIA) in 1943. With the OSS, Hunt operated with Chinese guerrillas behind Japanese lines in China. "I bring to these books a good deal of personal experience, aside from whatever insights I might have from foreign relations with the United States and the world. I put that in an entertaining, fictional context with different backdrops, whether India or China or Latin America. I've traveled widely and lived what a lot of people consider an interesting life."

Indeed. After joining the newly formed CIA in 1949, Hunt served in Mexico, the Balkans, the Far East, Europe, Uruguay and Guatemala. Hunt ran the psychological and political aspects of the CIA's Guatemalan coup of 1954, and in 1959 became the U.S. covert

plan from the Eisenhower administration, was adamantly opposed.

"There were people in the Agency and the Department of State who felt that the Cuban people would rise up against Castro once American forces were landed," explains Hunt of the doomed invasion. "But these were people who didn't speak Spanish, had never spent time in Latin America to get to know the Latin character. That's why I was asked to go over. So I went to Cuba a couple months before the Bay of Pigs and talked to people in all walks of life. And I came back and concluded that any invasion force could not expect any assistance from the Cuban people until it was all clear. Well, that doesn't help. So I said, 'It's going to have to be done all by us...we have to do it.'"

"See, what Eisenhower promised the exile group—through me—was that they would not face hostile air," Hunt continues. "What does that mean? It means there isn't going to be anybody flying topside and shooting you. It doesn't refer to the number of missions. And that's the little pissant excuse that the Kennedys have hid behind all these years. Because on that fateful Sunday morning, our exile planes had gone over and nailed all but three Castro planes on the ground. So while they were rearming in Nicaragua—that's where the air base was—that son-of-a-bitch General [Charles] Cabell, who was then the deputy [CIA director], wandered into our operations. He had been playing golf at the Chevy Chase Club and he was still wearing fucking golf

clothes—knickers and a cap—and he said, 'What's going on here?' We said, 'We're all busy—we're communicating with the field, giving instructions on the kind of armament and the loads and the targets.' And it all kind of boiled out—'We're going to run another strike—a mop-up strike!'

"So this four-star fucking general starts saying, 'Oh, I don't know about that! I don't recall permission being given for multiple strikes.' At that point, if anybody had had a gun in the place, I think they would've shot the cocksucker down! I mean, you have to have a will for victory, and he didn't. So then we had to get in the operational leaders—[CIA officers] Dick Bissell, Tracy Barnes, people like that, who had gone home for a few hours' sleep. And they finally said, 'We'll go over and talk to the secretary of state.' And then he said, 'Well, I think we have to take this up with the president.' Well, the president is out at his new retreat at Hickory Hill in Virginia. So [the secretary] went out there,

wants to be liked. This is nothing that ever bothered Julius Caesar. He didn't care about being liked—he had bigger goals. Nor did Alexander the Great or Churchill. These were sensible, pragmatic leaders. But people here are imbued with some sort of neo-Christian guilt that they want to be liked by everybody. They don't want to upset the apple cart—just settle for the status quo. They're more interested in a smooth surface than in establishing social justice for, say, the Cubans, or the Nicaraguans Well, you can't run a covert CIA operation which is overseen by 20 senators and congressmen and Christ knows who else."

Which brings us to the CIA of today, which some people question the relevance of since the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union. "I think it's very relevant—but for much different reasons than in the old days of the Cold War," says Hunt. "Now you have a series of rogue and renegade countries, mostly in the Middle East and parts of Africa, that pose a menace to the United States. And certainly



Hunt (with his attorney, Henry Goldman) testifies at the Senate Watergate Committee hearings on September 24, 1973.

because he loved the opportunity to go and see the president... I mean, this was a complete farce! And hours later—it was now close to night-fall in Miami—they said, 'The president won't allow any more strikes.' But if we had just done it—period—it would've been a *fiête champêtre*. But it wasn't done, and the Cuban aircraft—one of them was a British torpedo bomber—came over and sank our ships en route and stranded our men on the beach ... and that effectively ended it."

Years later, the extent to which the CIA plotted Castro's demise before and after the Bay of Pigs—a veritable Pandora's box of shady alliances between the CIA, Mafia and Cuban exiles in countless schemes and attempts to assassinate Castro—would be revealed. So why did so many attempts to eliminate Castro's regime fail?

"As far as I was concerned, a bunch of assholes were running the projects," simmers Hunt. "First of all, the United States desperately

there's the conundrum of Red China. And there is the uncontrolled government of North Korea, which in its death throes could unleash all kinds of weapons against South Korea and Japan.

"But the whole problem of recruitment and training and adapting new agents is something that the Agency hasn't resolved yet," adds Hunt. "I grew up, professionally, in the Cold War, and it takes a long time to train an agent. Many young people don't want to put that kind of time into learning a career. I can understand that, because they are required to have certain language skills, and now, of course, the interest is all away from the Romance languages. It's the exotic tongues, like Korean, Arabic, Swahili, Urdu and Farsi, that are needed. But who wants to go through all that misery for government salary, unless the person is super dedicated. Bright people would like to join, but can't afford to because they can start out at IBM or

JIM WELLS/SHUTTER PHOTOS

Brought down by the Watergate scandal, President Richard M. Nixon announces his resignation to the nation on August 8, 1974.

someplace at a much better entry level."

Could the CIA ever return to the vital force it once was? "Never," Hunt says with a sigh. "Where's the motivation? Where's the leadership? Where is there an Eisenhower, or even a Truman, God rest 'em, to say, 'This is something absolutely essential—we have to have it!' There's no one like that. You mean to tell me the Oxford protester we have as president is going to say that we really need a strong CIA? Look at who he's put in as directors—one guy a former chancellor of MIT and another with a Peace Corps background. I mean, give me a break! The Agency has become an international welfare organization—picking up trash and garbage in Haiti. I mean, what the hell are we doing in Haiti?"

"Quite frankly," Hunt adds, "I think I would be tried for insubordination if I was with the CIA today. I mean, I was used to a period when John Foster Dulles, for example, was secretary of state, and his brother [Allen Dulles] was the director of the CIA. These were highly educated, very pro-American gentlemen...."

"Look, the job of the CIA is to protect United States interests abroad," he states firmly.



"When I think of Nixon [during Watergate], I think of our World War Two officers' training: that a leader takes care of his followers before seeing to himself—a code Nixon seemed to have forgotten." —E. Howard Hunt

"That's why the Agency was founded. And wherever the threat emanates from is where the Agency has to be. It has to be there actively, and not simply as passive observers."

Given his years of CIA exploits and Watergate prosecution, Hunt keeps a lower profile these days. He writes in his home office almost daily, sometimes plays tennis and is raising two teenage children with his second wife, Laura, whom he met shortly after leaving prison. Hunt also has four children, now grown, that he had with his first wife, Dorothy—who was killed in a mysterious December 1972 plane crash during the initial Watergate investigations. Dorothy had once worked for the CIA, and when her United Airlines flight crashed approaching Chicago's Midway Airport, it was discovered that she had been carrying a large sum of "hush" money—cashier's checks and money orders—from the Nixon White House. Nixon had been reelected to a second term one month previous, Hunt was under arrest and threatening to blow the lid off of Watergate, and Nixon was desperately trying to contain the scandal.

After Hunt was arrested, the safe in Hunt's White House office was opened and the contents removed, including a stack of allegedly highly sensitive documents that were turned over to then-FBI director

L. Patrick Gray. In December 1972, Gray secretly burned these documents at his Connecticut home. According to journalist Tad Sulc in his 1974 biography of Hunt, *Compulsive Spy*, a few days after Dorothy Hunt's death, FBI agents searched the Hunt home for a second set of the documents that Hunt was rumored to have in his possession. Their search was unsuccessful.

It was definitely a trying time for Hunt, but he says he never fell into a sea of self-pity or bitterness. "Very early on in my imprisonment, I was at a chilling low," he confesses. "Suddenly I had motherless children to care for and the family organization was disintegrating rapidly. I was very depressed and I contemplated suicide a couple times. But then I realized I had a choice: either I can sink into the slough of bitterness and destroy my life at a time when my children needed me, or I could try every effort to extract myself from this mire and have a positive attitude towards the things I must do. And the first thing was to conduct myself in prison, so that I would be eligible for parole. And after 33 months, I was—I mean, I'd gone through so many fucking things for my government, for my people—I just had to slump that aside and get on the best I could. I came out reasonably unscathed."

However, what Hunt says he despised the most was the "religious

cop-out" of his fellow Watergate conspirators in prison. "Unlike [Charles] Colson or Jeb Magruder, I didn't claim to be born again and grab the sawdust trial of repentance. It made me ashamed of them. Don't do the crime if you can't do the time...."

"I used to get at least three or four Bibles a month sent to me in prison from people who wanted me to repent and follow the Yellow Brick Road to salvation," Hunt says with a grin, "but I felt, 'Hell, I have nothing to repent!' What I did was an honest effort, any more than I have anything to repent for what I did in World War II.... There's a long-standing left-wing cult mentality in this country that believes patriotism is wrong."

Hunt wishes Nixon had fessed up to his knowledge of the infamous dirty tricks operations run by Hunt and G. Gordon Liddy, which also included their break-in at the Los Angeles office of Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist after the publication of the Pentagon Papers, which Ellsberg had leaked to *The New York Times*. "The object was to get Ellsberg's files, because everyone thought he was psycho doing what he did," explains Hunt. "But we didn't get the information... it wasn't a successful mission." For that particular black bag job, the CIA had outfitted Hunt with a disguise consisting of a wig, a speech-altering device that fit in his mouth, false identification papers, as well as a miniature camera concealed in a tobacco pouch (Hunt was a pipe smoker).

"Nixon dishonored himself and he dishonored the presidency by lying," says Hunt. "And I think all of us involved, all of us who went to prison for long terms or short, would have understood it if Mr. Nixon had come forward and admitted his complicity to the extent that he was truthfully an accomplice or the generator of the activity. And then, if we had to go to prison, even then, that would've been OK."

"I mean, John Mitchell was the attorney general of the United States and was also Nixon's former law partner," Hunt elaborates, "and when Liddy wanted funds, he went to see the attorney general. So I can't imagine John Mitchell, a rather frugal man in his own life, being so liberal with funds without the chief's approval."

"And in fact, I had been to a White House reception, and I reminded Mr. Nixon that I had introduced myself to him some years before. And he said, 'Well, what are you doing now?' I said, 'I'm working for John Mitchell.' 'Oh, yes,' he said, 'I know all about that.' So there it is."

Though Hunt admits cryptically that "nobody still knows what the break-in was all about," he scoffs at the opinion of many that Watergate was really a CIA operation. "Well, it wasn't," he says. "It was just coincidental that [Watergate burglar and electronics expert] James McCord had been security officer at the Agency and that I'd been with the CIA, even though I had been retired for two years when it took place."

"If this had been a serious operation, if we had been doing this abroad, or even in Canada, someone would've been armed and that fucking guard would never have seen a *mañana*. It was a bungled operation. Why? Because no one took out the guard, that's why."

Given all the participants' past expertise at this sort of thing, including Bernard Barker and the Cuban entry team's 15 years of covert work for the CIA, theorists have questioned whether the botched burglary was a deliberate attempt to bring down Nixon in retaliation for Nixon's attempts to gain greater control of the CIA. After all, McCord had twice placed tape *horizontally* on the locks in a way the Watergate guard couldn't miss. McCord also shut off his radio receiver, thereby missing the warning from the team across the street that a guard was

approaching. And it was McCord who wrote the infamous letter to Judge Sirica, just as the affair was about to be swept under the rug, warning that "higher ups" were involved in Watergate. Another CIA officer, Alexander Butterfield, let slip to the Senate Watergate Committee that the president was taping all his Oval Office conversations, providing the final nail for Nixon's coffin. Butterfield, on leave from the CIA, had requested assignment to the White House. Plus, the first lawyer in the police precinct the night the burglars were arrested was reportedly a CIA attorney, there to represent men who had allegedly "retired" from the Agency and had no connection with it. And *Washington Post* reporter Bob Woodward's "Deep Throat" was a secret source clearly connected with the intelligence community.

"Pure coincidence," insists Hunt.

But no sooner had the Watergate controversy died down when another controversy thrust Hunt back into the headlines. During the House Select Committee's late-1970s investigation into the JFK assassination, a former CIA operative named Victor Marchetti—who served as a special assistant to then-CIA director Richard Helms—came forward claiming that Hunt had been involved with the assassination. Marchetti cited, among other things, a 1966 memo initialed by Helms and then-CIA counterintelligence chief James Angleton stating that "Hunt's presence in Dallas had to be kept secret because it would be damaging to the Agency should it leak out." The memo, Marchetti added, also said that giving Hunt an alibi "ought to be considered."

With the heat on the CIA by Congress, the Agency was going to be offering a "limited hangout," a technique of giving investigators a part of what they seek while still concealing the big picture, and Hunt was apparently being fingered. Marchetti published the account in an August 1978 issue of *The Spotlight*, a publication of the right-wing Liberty Lobby, and Hunt later sued for defamation. Hunt gave an alibi to investigators at the time, saying that on November 22, 1963, he was in Washington, D.C., and he took off at noon that day and went shopping and had a Chinese dinner in downtown Washington with his wife. CIA sources were quoted at the time as saying that Hunt's story about being in Washington was a cover story concocted as a result of the memo. Nevertheless, Hunt won the case.

But then in the early 1980s, famed Washington D.C. attorney and former JFK campaign manager Mark Lane stepped in as defense counsel for the publication and set out to prove that the CIA indeed was involved in Kennedy's assassination and that Hunt had been in Dallas the week of November 22, 1963. In the second trial, Hunt claimed that the allegations against him were causing his family stress, and that his children, now adults, were starting to fear that he might really have been involved in JFK's death. However, when again questioned under oath where he was when JFK was shot, Hunt said he was home watching TV with his children. This obvious discrepancy cost Hunt his case. Why would his kids worry that he was in Dallas if he had supposedly been with them at home? Lane won the case in 1985 and claimed that this and other evidence presented forced the Miami jury to conclude "that the CIA had indeed killed President Kennedy."

"It was the first time since the shots were fired in Dallas that any jury ever said that," Lane said in a recent interview at his Washington office. "It was historical...."

"We demonstrated that every one of Mr. Hunt's alibis was a carefully constructed fabrication," he continued. Lane, who was one of the first

to challenge the validity of the Warren Report, with his 1966 bestseller, *Rush to Judgment*, detailed the Hunt trial in his 1991 *New York Times* best-seller *Plausible Denial*. "We clearly showed that he could not present evidence of people who could fully support his alibi."

What's more, Lane added, "We demonstrated that his [claim that he had] respect and love for John Kennedy was false, and in fact, he hated John Kennedy and tried to implicate him after his death for the murder of [South Vietnamese President] Ngo Dinh Diem, for which Kennedy was not involved." (While working in the Nixon White House, Hunt, under the direction of Nixon aide Charles Colson, forged State Department cables falsely implicating JFK in the death of Diem, who was assassinated a month before JFK was shot.)

"And finally," added Lane, "there was the sworn testimony of Maritta Lorenz—a former CIA operative used by the Agency in its assassination plots against Castro—who identified Hunt as the paymaster for the JFK assassins. That was one of the last pieces of evidence that made it clear that an article which said Mr. Hunt was involved, and the CIA did it, could not be basis for defamation." Hunt was ordered to pay Liberty Lobby \$25,000 in court costs.

"I was in Washington that day [of the assassination]," insists Hunt with a shrug. "I hadn't left Washington for days. And there are witnesses who will say that under oath in hand. But that's not enough. I mean, I never went to Dallas till long after it happened I did all I could to set the record straight, but it's just too difficult."

"I used to get three or four Bibles a month sent to me in prison from people who wanted me to repent and follow the Yellow Brick Road to salvation, but I felt, 'Hell! I have nothing to repent!'" —E. Howard Hunt

False
But alleged links with the assassination continue to dog Hunt. Hunt was the agent in charge of the CIA's Mexico City station in September 1963, when Lee Harvey Oswald allegedly visited the Soviet and Cuban embassies there, promoted at the time as "proof" of Oswald's fanaticism for Communism. But in his 1980 book *Conspiracy* (reprinted in 1998 as *Not In Your Lifetime*), British author Anthony Summers reported that eyewitnesses and CIA surveillance photos taken outside those embassies revealed a different man assuming Oswald's identity, and embassy phone calls taped by the CIA, allegedly made by Oswald, were made by an imposter, two months before the assassination.

In 1978, during their investigation of the assassination, members of the House Select Committee interviewed Cuban government officials. In a top-secret CIA report of those meetings, recently declassified by the Assassinations Records Review Board, the Cuban officials told U.S. investigators that in order to help solve the assassination, they needed "...copies of Lee Harvey Oswald's signatures that the Cuban government could use to perform its own handwriting comparison test" as well as a list of "E. Howard Hunt's aliases." [author's italics]

In H. R. Haldeman's 1978 book *The Ends Of Power*—detailing his years as Nixon's chief of staff—Haldeman states that Nixon's concerns about Hunt and the references to "the Bay of Pigs" heard on the Watergate tapes was really a code. Haldeman wondered why Nixon kept insisting that he use that phrase to pressure the CIA into forcing the FBI to shut down the Watergate investigations. He wrote, "It seems that in all of those Nixon references to the Bay of Pigs, he was actually

referring to the Kennedy assassination.... After Kennedy was killed, the CIA launched a fantastic cover-up.... The CIA literally erased any connection between Kennedy's assassination and the CIA In fact, Counter Intelligence Chief James Angleton of the CIA called [assistant director] Bill Sullivan of the FBI and rehearsed the questions and answers they would give to the Warren Commission investigators And when Nixon said, 'It's likely to blow the whole Bay Of Pigs' he might have been reminding Helms, not so gently, of the cover-up of the CIA assassination attempts on the hero of the Bay of Pigs, Fidel Castro—a CIA operation that may have triggered the Kennedy tragedy and which Helms desperately wanted to hide."

Yes, it's truly been a strange, enigmatic life for Howard Hunt, having surfaced in so many pivotal moments in Cold War history that even Jim Phelps of TV's "Mission: Impossible" and the shadowy "Cigarette-Smoking Man" from TV's "The X-Files" are based on him.

Hunt takes me into his office, and on the desk is his 1950 manual typewriter that he still prefers to use when spinning his literary tales. The walls are adorned with old photos—Hunt and Eisenhower, Hunt and CIA cofounder Allen Dulles—as well as various CIA awards, citations and tools from his days as a covert agent. But it's a career that Hunt says he doesn't miss. "There was a period of time when work was very intense and the rewards were quite substantial, in terms of personal satisfaction," explains Hunt, who after Watergate was left with close to \$1 million in legal bills. "But that tapers off after a while. I very much

enjoyed the hands-on work I did in the Guatemala project and the Cuban project. But it becomes burnout. I'm not burnt out on my writing. That's still extremely exciting for me."

Hunt is already under way on his next novel. He admits that he sometimes wonders what life would have been like had Watergate never happened. "I was very content writing.... I was making a good income and my family lived very well in Maryland," he says softly. "And then Watergate destroyed my life, it's as simple as that...."

"When I think of Nixon," he continues, "I also think of our WWII officers' training: that a leader takes care of his followers before seeing to himself—a code Nixon seemed to have forgotten. Long before his death, he admitted responsibility for Watergate, but took none of the blame. That's cold comfort for those who lost so much in a vain effort to protect him from himself. He did gain a measure of redemption in death, but I still remember, as Richard Nixon lay on his deathbed, uncharitably recalling Shelley's words on George III: 'An old, mad, blind, despised and dying King.'"

As for his own legacy, Hunt says matter-of-factly, "History will be a lot less kind to me than it's been to Richard Nixon. I expect when I die, the caption will read: 'Watergate burglar dies at age 80-plus,' and that will be it. And everything else will be bullshit. And," he adds, "they'll also say, 'He was implicated in the Kennedy assassination.'"

David Giammarco is a Toronto-based journalist who for the past decade has been researching the secret history of the Cold War.